

Education Corner

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By Lynn Smith, Principal

Parents often ask the question: “How can I teach my child responsibility?” The overall objective for parents of young children is to teach them that their actions have inevitable consequences. One of the most serious results of a permissive society is the failure of parents to make a connection between behavior and consequences. Too often a three-year-old child screams insults at his mother, but mom ignores this behavior. A first grader launches an attack on his teacher, but the school makes excuses for his age and takes no action. A ten-year-old is caught stealing candy in a store, but is released to his parents with no penalties for his actions. A fifteen-year-old sneaks the keys to the family car, but his father pays the fine when his son is arrested. A seventeen-year-old drives the family car like a maniac and his parents pay for the repairs when he wraps it around a telephone pole!

You see, all through childhood, loving parents seem determined to intervene between behavior and consequences, breaking the connection and preventing the valuable learning that could have occurred. Thus it is possible for a young man or lady to enter adult life not really knowing that every move we make directly affects our future, that irresponsible behavior eventually produces sorrow and pain.

How can parents connect behavior with consequences? Here are some suggestions:

- a. By being willing to let children experience a reasonable amount of pain or inconvenience when they behave irresponsibly.
- b. If Jane carelessly loses her lunch money, let her skip a meal.
- c. When Jimmy leaves his homework home for the fifth time this week, do not leave work to go home for it – allow him to be punished by his teacher.
- d. If Tommy deliberately pushes Paul down and Paul’s glasses get broken, explain to Tommy that his allowance will be used to pay for the glasses.
- e. If fourteen-year-old Tina consistently refuses to lay out her clothes and homework the night before and causes the family to be late, leave her with instructions to catch the bus or the neighbor. If she arrives at school late, so be it – allow her to accept the punishment for this, too.

If irresponsible behavior is not modified during childhood, parents will be “bailing out” their grown children and producing emotional cripples who often develop lasting characteristics of dependency and immaturity.